

ARKATI

THE VASSALLO GROUP PUBLICATION 2023



CHANNELLING CARE



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T: +356 2210 7700 • M: +356 7960 2024 • E: info@mcs.edu.mt

www.mcs.edu.mt



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to this edition of *Arkati* Magazine, where we delve into the heart of the Vassallo Group's indomitable spirit; a spirit that has not only withstood challenges but thrived, embracing innovation and setting new benchmarks.

Our cover story captures a milestone in the Group's narrative – the establishment of Dar San Ġużepp in Gozo, symbolising the Group's relentless pursuit of growth and its commitment to making a positive impact on communities.

In exclusive interviews, we engage with the Group Chairperson and CEO, gaining insights into the strategic vision that has guided the Vassallo Group through dynamic landscapes.

This edition takes you on a journey across the diverse operational domains, from construction, to healthcare, hospitality, catering, property, education, and sport. The CEOs and top management share their experiences and strategies, showcasing the Group's adaptability and excellence across sectors.

As we celebrate success, we shine a spotlight on the exceptional individuals who embody the Group's values. The Shine Awards honour our dedicated employees, and recognise their outstanding contributions. These interviews offer a glimpse into the passion and commitment that fuels the Group's success, proving that its strength lies not only in its leadership but in the collective efforts of a remarkable team.

Arkati Magazine invites you to explore the dynamic world of Vassallo Group, where challenges are met with resilience, and innovation paves the way for a future defined by excellence. Join us in celebrating a legacy of triumphs, as we continue to set sail towards new horizons.

While hoping you enjoy reading *Arkati*, we would like to wish you all a very peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The Editorial Team

ON THE COVER

CareMalta Group makes its first foray into Gozo. Photo: *Daniel Cilia*.

EDITORIAL TEAM: Natalie Briffa Farrugia, Pio Vassallo, Charlo Bonnici, Maria Christine Pillow
GENERAL COORDINATION: Maria Christine Pillow **EDITORIAL CONTENT COORDINATION:** Media Insiders
INTERVIEWS: Adriana Bishop, Coryse Borg, Sarah Carabott and Ariadne Massa
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION: Joseph Schembri **PHOTOGRAPHY:** iCam Studios **PRINTING:** Print It



Making waves in Gozo's healthcare

Pioneers of public-private-partnerships in different segments of society's healthcare, Vassallo Group is marking another first by crossing over to the sister island of Gozo to provide long-term care.

This is a significant milestone for CareMalta Group as it aims to create one of the finest care homes for the elderly at Dar San Ġuzepp, offering residents a serene environment with breathtaking views.

Nestled on the side of the road in Ġhajnsielem, on the way to Victoria, Casa di San Giuseppe, has been a landmark for years and was formerly a Church-run youth hostel.

In January 2023, after years of legal delays, the highest court upheld the decision to award the €30 million government contract to equip and manage Dar San Ġuzepp to the CareMalta.

The Group's different entities have since been overcoming logistical challenges to finish the place to the highest standards and CareMalta is excited to be opening this high-end project in early 2024.

This move will bring CareMalta Group's trademark expertise to the island and provide a second home from home to the older persons that will reside in it. ■





A full-page portrait of Natalie Briffa Farrugia, a woman with curly blonde hair, smiling and standing outdoors with her arms crossed. She is wearing a bright pink long-sleeved dress with a ruffled waist and a watch on her left wrist. The background shows a green lawn and a stone wall.

Facing the music

NATALIE BRIFFA FARRUGIA
CHAIRPERSON, VASSALLO GROUP

No man is an island and certainly no business operates in a vacuum, which is why Natalie is very much aware of the 360-degree implications of overseeing Vassallo Group in a global context. And during her first two years of “transition”, by her own admission, she has had to “face a lot of music”.

“I took up this position post-Covid and in a war era,” she begins. “Every business has to position itself in the global scenario. It has to continue to adapt to what is happening in the world and we are responsible for how the world continues to evolve. That is how I see my role and that is how I would like to see the Group evolving. Sustainability is key.”

Lessons are still being learnt from the challenges of the pandemic and war but there is no going back to ‘before’.

“We can never go back to how it was. The most important thing is for each business to take stock of available opportunities today, with how things are evolving right now and what we can do with today’s opportunities. The orientation of ‘now’ in each business perspective is very important. Whatever made sense yesterday might not make sense today. The world is moving forward and you need to continue to adapt and adjust to realities.”

For Natalie, the highlights of this year evolve around the success brought about from the Group’s new developments, namely the Campus Hub and Vassallo Business Park. While the greatest opportunity ahead remains the digitisation in the care industry, creating different scenarios to beat the trend of surplus in commercial properties is also of great importance.

The need for transformation, she believes, continues to be felt, especially in industries which face labour shortages or lack of quality in the workforce.

“Success in facing all the changing realities is not just carrying on regardless. If it’s raining you don’t just open another umbrella. You need to re-analyse.”

And, if team work makes the dream work, then a more democratic leadership style is the recipe to ensure the business continues to evolve.

“One of my aspirations is that the boardroom continues to become a forum for discussion. That is an accomplishment for the Group, for all directors and for me as the chairperson looking at how the transformation of the boardroom can continue to happen. The boardroom has become more of a collective discussion now with the involvement of all members.”

And one of the results of such a consultative approach was the introduction of an annual meeting with all the banks to



continue strengthening the Group’s relationship with its stakeholders.

“It enabled us to be transparent with our progress and gave all CEOs the opportunity to interact with each other and with our stakeholders.”

If this year was HILA’s time to shine with the opening of Santa Rosa and offering services to the new Dar Bjorn, next year the Group will mark two major milestones: the expansion into Gozo with the inauguration of Dar San Ġużepp in

Ghajnsielem and the introduction into the education sector with the Mediterranean College of Sport.

“We are very proud and excited about the Gozo project,” Natalie says enthusiastically. “I am sure we can deliver our quality mark in care.”

The Mediterranean College of Sport reaffirms the Group’s commitment to society while combining the family’s love for sports. Natalie credits her brother Pio

for his vision to create this college and his unswerving passion for football which he pursued “through great opposition”.

“He is a great influence to a lot of people, including me, and now our business model is actually delivering it nationwide. Our ambition is to train students so they can have a dual career – in sports and business.”

But it takes more than just ambition and talent. “Unless you have resilience, discipline, determination and perseverance you will not survive.”

Which is pretty much the formula for the Group’s evolution. ■

“Unless you have
resilience, discipline,
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not survive”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what’s the first thing you do?

I wake up very early. Twice a week I go running and once a week I drop off my kids at swimming lessons.

What does success mean to you?

Success is waking up in the morning with a grateful heart and having a purpose for your day.

What’s the best business/life advice you have received?

Face the music.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Chocolate.

How do you unwind?

I pray. That is how I switch off.

A year of triumphs and transformations

PIO VASSALLO

GROUP CEO, VASSALLO GROUP

This year brought with it a mixture of optimism and challenges for Vassallo Group. However, despite facing both pre-pandemic and new hurdles, the prevailing sentiment is undeniably positive.

According to Group CEO Pio Vassallo, one challenge that persisted throughout this year is the recruitment of new personnel.

"Finding the right people to join the CareMalta team, in particular, has proven to be an ongoing challenge. However, this issue is one of very few clouds in an otherwise bright year," he says.

In fact, 2023 marked a significant expansion for CareMalta, as it ventured into Gozo for the first time, with Dar San Ġuzepp.

"We aim to create one of the finest care homes in the Maltese islands, complete with breathtaking views. The response from the local community has been exceptionally positive, and we are looking to employ several people from Gozo," he states.

"This project had its own obstacles to be surmounted, but it is now set to open by early 2024. This is a very high-end project, and I am very excited about it."

In a major victory for CareMalta, it also secured the services of Zammit Clapp for another four years. This success was, however, tinged by the closure of the Bormla home; a reminder that not everything in the healthcare sector is without its challenges.

Despite the hurdles, CareMalta remained committed to its mission of leaving a positive impact on society. The opening of Santa Rosa in Mosta, catering to the disability sector, aligns perfectly with their vision.

Projects such as these have increased the demand for new skills and personnel within the organisation, prompting a search for individuals eager to make a difference.

To address the dearth of staff in the healthcare sector, CareMalta has turned to

Learning Works, the Group's educational arm, which offers courses in nursing and health-related fields, as well as other areas.

One of Vassallo Group's most significant projects is the Mediterranean College of Sport, set to welcome new students by next year.

The collaboration with the Jesuits and St Aloysius College is already bearing fruit, with students utilising facilities such as the North Pavilion. The project's next phases include the opening of a gym and a swimming pool complex.

"Our primary areas of focus include specialised training in football, athletics, water polo, and swimming. Enrollment for the upcoming academic year commencing in September 2024 is now in progress. We have received exceptionally positive feedback from both prospective students and employers alike," he says.

The institution will welcome both Maltese students and international learners, providing educational opportunities from form one through to sixth form.

Partnerships have always been pivotal to Vassallo Group's success. Collaborations with the government and organisations, such as the ALS Foundation, have significantly contributed to the Group's growth.

For instance, the Vassallo Business Park project, in partnership with Dennis and Jesmond Vassallo of J & D Enterprises, has evolved over five years and is now almost fully sold out. Collaborations such as these highlight the Group's commitment to engaging with others to achieve their goals.

The tourism sector has also experienced a resurgence, with 2023 seeing a return to pre-pandemic levels. The achievement of all targets for the year bodes well for the future. However, challenges related to the national airline may pose uncertainties.

The Group's largest investment, Campus Hub, enjoyed an exceptional year, witnessing growth in both accommodation and public facilities, such as the Pjazza.

"The mission of Vassallo Group is to bring about a positive change in society"





UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what's the first thing you do?

I normally get up at 6 am. I then spend a few minutes on the Duolingo app. I have been learning Spanish for a few weeks and it's going really well. It's quite addictive! Then, I do about an hour of physical training – either at the gym or I go for a run or a swim. Currently I am training to do a Half Ironman in Brazil.

What does success mean to you?

Success means leaving a positive impact on one another, and achieving goals as a team.

What's the best business / life advice you received?

In business and in life you will be faced with very difficult decisions to make. If you always do what is right and what is fair you will never fail.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Pizza (especially tuna pizza) and Twistes!

How do you unwind?

I enjoy going to watch my 16-year-old son play football with Mosta FC.

With the final phase – the construction of a medical school is slated for 2024 – this investment is set to become a hub of excellence in education and community engagement.

With an eye on the future, Vassallo Group has identified alternative energy as a target area for growth. The organisation is also determined to comply with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) regulations by next year. This commitment will influence their processes across all sectors, ensuring a more sustainable approach.

The catering sector, through Cake Box, is also poised for growth as the Group plans to expand to more venues in Malta.

Finally, the realty arm has had its share of ups and downs, with a surplus in rentals balanced by rising demand for residential properties. The organisation will be shifting its focus towards buying property, especially for first-time buyers.

The mission of Vassallo Group is to bring about a positive change in society, while continually adapting to a changing world, is as strong as ever. As this year draws to a close, Pio and his team are gearing up for an exciting 2024. ■



‘Success is not an individual sport but a team effort’

CHRISTIAN VASSALLO

CEO, CAMPUS HUB

The transformation of Campus Hub has been nothing short of remarkable. Returning students were this year greeted with the warmth of familiarity as they came back to the University of Malta after the summer break, while those new to Campus Hub were quick to embrace it.

This year's Freshers Week was a collaborative effort involving three key players: KSU, Freehour, and Campus Hub, with KSU taking the lead.

“The primary goal was to create an unforgettable week. The feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive, with many describing it as more of a ‘student village’ than a typical campus setting,” Christian says with a smile.

Campus Hub is not just for university students. It has become a welcoming space for a diverse range of individuals.

“Students from Junior College frequently visit after their lectures, as do people working at Mater Dei Hospital and even academics and the public. The key to this inclusivity lies in the creation of a vibrant central piazza, a rarity in Malta. It's a space where people can meet, relax, and enjoy each other's company without the presence of cars,” he explains.

Benches are thoughtfully placed in the square, offering a space for anyone to unwind, whether they purchase something from the outlets or bring their own lunch. The inclusion of Wellbee's Supermarket and a variety of cafes, including Cake Box, further enhances its convenience and appeal.

To foster a sense of community, a plethora of activities are organised, including free basketball and table tennis.

One of the standout features of Campus Hub is its student



accommodation. The choice to live here is increasingly popular, with a significant number of returning students and a growing international community making Campus Hub their home. The accommodation offers more than just a place to sleep; they include a gym and a pool, reflecting the commitment to providing a holistic student experience.

In addition to comfortable living spaces, Campus Hub has fostered a strong sense of community among its residents.

“Special events, such as parties, cooking sessions, movie nights, and open-air discussions, help students connect and

“The team's tireless efforts have contributed to the hub's vibrant atmosphere, which continues to evolve”



make lasting memories. It's more than a residence; it's a community,” Christian says.

The commercial outlets within the Hub have also found remarkable success, attracting not only students but also families. Weekends are particularly lively, with families bringing their children to enjoy amenities like a bouncy castle and space for children to ride their bikes and scooters.

Parents can relax in a café or restaurant while keeping an eye on their little ones. The supermarket and pharmacy add to the convenience. Free parking is available on weekends, making it



a perfect destination for families seeking a day out.

Listening to stakeholders and students has been pivotal to their progress, Christian says.

“With over 25 nationalities living within Campus Hub, requests are diverse and varied. The team strives to accommodate everyone’s needs, from offering halal meat and authentic Asian cuisine to providing access to the Turkish football league and more. The goal is to create an inclusive environment where all members of the community, including lecturers and people working at Mater Dei Hospital, can enjoy campus life to the fullest.”

Christian attributes much of the success to his dedicated management team, many of whom have been with Campus Hub since its inception.

“Their tireless efforts have contributed to the facility’s vibrant atmosphere, which continues to evolve,” he says.

In 2024, Campus Hub intends to build on its achievements and continue expanding and creating spaces for all university students. This includes

providing a good working environment for over 150 individuals who work on the premises.

The final part of Campus Hub’s development plan is to house a medical school for the University of Malta. The commitment to realising this vision remains unwavering.

“The need for additional space for medical students, particularly in the wake of the challenges posed by Covid-19, makes a new medical school on campus a significant opportunity,” he says.

As the CEO of Campus Hub, Christian remains committed to the facility’s long-term success. He acknowledges that while the indicators are positive, it’s too early to call it a ‘success’. Instead, he views this phase as setting the foundation for future achievements.

“The proximity to the university provides an excellent opportunity for learning and growth. We want to continue to be a solution for students. Our main aim has been to listen and learn. We have a long way to go, but I’m very satisfied with what we have achieved so far.” ■

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what’s the first thing you do?

I wake up at 5.20am and go to the gym.

What does success mean to you?

Success means being a good father to my five children, a good husband to my wife Emily, to do my part in the family business, and to keep fit and remain physically and mentally strong. Finding the balance between the four is the key.

What’s the best business / life advice you received?

Hard work pays off. It is important to take decisions at the appropriate time even when they are very difficult. Success is not an individual sport but a team effort. I learned this from playing rugby, which teaches you discipline and respect.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Ice cream from Cake Box. Especially *nocciola* and pistachio.

How do you unwind?

Going to the gym and being with my kids.

A man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a white long-sleeved button-down shirt and dark trousers with a brown belt, stands smiling in front of a light-colored wooden wall. A large, minimalist clock with a thin metal frame and two hands is visible in the upper left corner of the image.

We don't go for gut feelings

RUBEN VASSALLO
CEO, VASSALLO GROUP REALTY

It has been three years since the pandemic upended our lives but the real estate market is still reeling from the shock to the system as our relationship with our homes and offices have changed irrevocably.

And this change is most visible in the office market as companies have streamlined their space requirements by allowing their staff to continue to work from home. This has inevitably led to a rethink of the property supply.

"What you used to take for granted two or three years ago is not [valid] anymore," says Ruben Vassallo, CEO of Vassallo Group Realty. While the Group continues to see an increase in demand for residential and commercial properties there has been a "total change in the office market".

"Companies don't require such large areas anymore. I don't think this will change in the near future," continues Ruben.

With cranes dominating Malta's skyline, the question of whether Malta has reached saturation point in terms of property supply comes only naturally.

"From our side we're limited in the supply we have, so we're not talking about major changes in our portfolio but as a country we should study the supply we put on the market very closely.

The country should start looking at what demand there is and what supply we provide. Projects should be based on research studies rather than gut feelings. We [as a Group] don't go for the gut feeling approach.

"The country's economy is heavily invested in property, not just us [as a Group]. Any changes affecting the country are worrying to us. Is Malta still attractive for business? Will new companies continue to come to set up shop in Malta? The market is built for new companies coming in but if they stop coming then it's just an internal competition."

He conceded that in some sectors, such as hotels, Malta was reaching oversupply but construction was continuing regardless of an MHRA study which showed there are too many hotel rooms.

"As a country we don't truly study the research available. The office sector faces the same issues, probably a bit worse. We are seeing a lot of offices going up and demand going down. Demand for the residential market is still there. We have been through a very big building boom in Malta but going forward things need to change and we must admit that," explains Ruben, adding that Malta would do better to focus on "quality rather than quantity".

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what's the first thing you do?

I wake up at 5.30am to help my daughters get ready for school. I leave for work at 6.15am, visiting sites most mornings. Twice a week I go for a run.

What does success mean to you?

Success means being happy with what I achieve and going home feeling happy with what I've done. I don't measure success through money but through the feedback from people using our projects.

What's the best business/life advice you have ever received?

Love what you do.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

I like to socialise a lot but it does affect me health-wise.

How do you unwind?

With my daughters. Or rowing, kayaking or tending to my classic cars.



“The country's economy is heavily invested in property... Any changes affecting the country are worrying to us”

After closing “a very good year”, Ruben and his team are now looking forward to a “very busy” six months ahead with the completion of Dar San Ġuzepp in Gozo and a new home for alternative care in Senglea scheduled to be finished by February. VGR will also be overseeing the expansion of some of CareMalta's properties and starting the construction of a new seafront apartment block in Buġibba.

Dar San Ġuzepp will not be the only project in Gozo as the Group is awaiting the permit to commence works on transforming a former discotheque in the heart of Victoria into a specialised service delivery by HILA. Adapting a property for a completely different use presents numerous challenges, not least the question of whether or not to preserve the old building itself or start completely afresh. “This is a very particular building but we will keep the exterior as a focal point.”

Santa Rosa in Mosta presented a similar challenge as it occupies the site of two traditional townhouses. Here, Ruben was inspired by his grandmother's house and that feeling of love and support he always felt when entering her home.

“I remember the entrance to her house was pink and I wanted to recreate it. We kept the facade and the main entrance so that when you enter, it feels like home.” ■



Another solid financial year

STEPHEN BORG

FINANCE DIRECTOR, VASSALLO GROUP



“Our overriding principle is to do something new, or at least do it differently and better”



This has not been the easiest of years. As the world recovers from the post-Covid shock, and war continues to blight the continent with its domino effect on the supply market, a number of challenges abounded in 2023, mainly surrounding inflation and the increased cost of finance.

But, as Group Director of Finance and Company Secretary Stephen Borg points out, Vassallo Group was well positioned to face such challenges head on and capitalise on the opportunities they presented.

“The Group performance for 2023 appears solid,” says Stephen emphatically. “All the Group business pillars performed at the expected budgeted levels.”

He added that the University of Malta’s Campus Hub and Vassallo Business Park both registered “an excellent first full year of operation”.

Moreover, associated companies mainly in the hospitality industry, which was so badly affected during the pandemic have all returned to pre-2020 levels and even improved upon them. “Overall, 2023 should result in another positive performance for the Vassallo Group.”

With 23 years of experience in the Group, and counting, Stephen has witnessed its journey as it ventured into new areas and projects, with all the inherent obstacles and challenges that growth and innovation inevitably brings. He believes the Group’s drive to always be “dynamic, distinct and diverse” is what contributes towards its success.

“By ‘distinct and diverse’ we believe that the Group identifies niche areas of business, assessing them as a standalone. Once viability is established, all efforts are made to support that business initiative throughout its early years and then push to ensure growth,” explains Stephen.

That’s not to say that innovation should be pursued at any cost. “The overriding principle is to do something new, or at least do it differently and better, but even though this requires the Group to be bold, sometimes taking the decision to pull the plug is just as bold. I guess it is wiser to admit that you were wrong than to persevere in wrongdoing.”

“Another principle for success has also been the concept of drivers,” he continues. “Unless an activity is owned by a driver it tends to lose steam and impetus and hence, coupled with a ‘distinct and diverse’ business idea, we believe that each activity needs a dynamic driver. I believe these have been the basic principles of the Group’s success.”

For the first time ever, the Group brought together all the banks which finance it in one meeting during which Stephen, along with Group chairperson Natalie Briffa Farrugia and Group CEO Pio Vassallo, presented its financial report and proposals for future projects.

So groundbreaking was this initiative that Natalie described it as a “meaningful achievement” and there are plans for this to become an annual event.

“Banks are our partners,” points out Stephen. “They share in our success and sometimes even in our disappointments which is why it feels only natural to share with them all our thoughts, results and plans for the future. It is no secret that Vassallo Group has a business relationship with all major local banks and we value each relationship equally and plan to grow it in the years to come.”

One of the year’s highlights, which the Group’s senior management always look forward to, is the two-day Budget seminar that sets the tone for the coming year and beyond through a series of presentations and discussions.

“Budgeting has always been high on the Group’s agenda. If you don’t have a goal and a path to get there then it is very unlikely the goal can be achieved,” says Stephen. “In these last couple of years we have also amplified the budgeting process to take it to Group level so that each business entity can visualise its position as a cog in this big wheel which is the Group.”

This year Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) goals will also be high on the agenda with the Group expecting to be in a position to announce its position on this matter by 2025.

“The Group is aware of its obligations and reporting requirements in this area and is gearing up to be able to face these challenges. The Group’s commitment to ESG principles has always been and remains unwavering. The dedication to these principles is not only integral to the Group’s long-term sustainability but also evidence of resilience and adaptability in the face of global change.” ■

‘This isn’t about what’s easy, but doing what needs to be done’

JONATHAN BUTTIGIEG

CEO, VASSALLO BUILDERS

With Vassallo Group’s rapid growth these last three to four years, Vassallo Builders, the oldest and possibly the busiest arm of the Group, was yet again instrumental for its overall success, Jonathan Buttigieg believes.

Among the key projects completed this year, are the Vassallo Business Park in Burmarrad, the Malta International Airport Service Station, which was “architecturally, quite a challenge to build”, and a smaller yet very satisfying high-spec lecture hall for the International Maritime Law Institute.

Other ongoing projects are the Mediterranean College of Sport and Dar San Ġuzepp in Gozo, among others. The scaffolding division led by George Azzopardi, has also achieved remarkable success this year, demonstrating substantial growth and “surpassing all set targets”.

The establishment of the Group’s inaugural home in Gozo marks a significant change in the operations of Vassallo Builders, showcasing their adeptness in handling new logistical hurdles, such as daily commuting via ferry to the construction site. They have addressed these challenges by recruiting workers either residing in Gozo or open to relocation, enabling their participation in the project management team. Additionally, Vassallo Builders has proactively sought to source materials directly from Gozitan companies, showcasing their commitment to local collaboration and resource utilisation.

In 2024, Vassallo Builders will be entering the second part of its five-year strategy and will see the implementation of some of the changes for which foundations, pun intended, were laid this year.

“Next year we will be undergoing some changes in the way we operate with more effort dedicated to four key growth areas, namely developments for first-time buyers, decarbonisation, scaffolding and prefabricated buildings,” explains Jonathan.

This will be over and above existing works within the Group and with third-party clients, including the construction of a block of apartments in Sliema, a factory in Ta’ Qali and transforming a derelict building on the Bugibba seafront into a multiuse facility.

Vassallo Builders will be seeking partners to develop properties with the aim of selling them to first-time buyers under an attractive financing scheme. Without revealing too many details, Jonathan said Vassallo Builders has been working on “a model with a buyer’s friendly formula, to keep the price affordable without compromising quality”.

Construction projects not only dominate Malta’s skyline but also the news headlines and Jonathan is very vocal about how the sector should be regulated to ensure more professionalism all around.

“The Jean Paul Sofia accident is a tragedy not just for the family, but for the industry as a whole. What we’re hearing is very sad and embarrassing for the industry.”





“There are dwindling numbers of Maltese who study construction and for an industry lacking so much skill, this is counterproductive”

While welcoming the recent introduction of licensing in an industry that has been neglected for years, Jonathan stressed this was only “a start but not enough is being done”.

He concedes it is difficult to convince the public not to paint all operators in the industry with the same brush.

“Clients know Vassallo Builders and a few others like us are professionals. Our clients do not put us in the same box as the rest of the industry and I am very proud that people know we go the extra mile to protect our workers and third parties. However, the public in general is unfortunately driven by what they see and read in the media, and although it bothers me, I do understand their pain and the need to blame, especially when tragedy strikes; I share that same pain too. But generalising is not only unfair to the professional builder, it is also inaccurate and a result of a lack of information.”

The industry has such a bad rap that it is even affecting recruitment.

“We are already finding it very hard to employ competent well-trained people, both locally and from abroad. There are dwindling numbers of Maltese who study construction and for an industry lacking so much skill, this is counterproductive. How do you make this industry attractive to work in? We are trying very hard to portray a professional image to attract people to work in the industry but they refuse because of its bad reputation. And then you get criticised for not employing skilled workers. It’s a vicious circle.

“This is a big challenge. And as I’ve been doing so far, I will continue to support any measures the Building and Construction Authority take to improve the construction industry, prioritising professionalism and safety for workers, third parties and the public in general. It is not easy for the authorities having to go from an industry with zero regulations to suddenly regulating over 30,000 workers. But this isn’t about what’s easy but about doing what needs to be done.” ■

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what’s the first thing you do?

I don’t sleep very well. Every day I’m awake by 4am but stay in bed until the alarm goes off at 6.15am. This is my quiet reflection time.

What does success mean to you?

Having set a goal, involving my team of 271 people and achieving it, that is success.

What’s the best business/life advice you have ever received?

When I was appointed CEO, Tonio Depasquale told me “treat people beneath you as if they were your children, be their father”. I cherish my children and when Tonio said that to me it revealed a whole new perspective to how you manage people. It kept me grounded with my team.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Good whisky.

How do you unwind?

Sitting by the bar at home sipping a tot of whisky with my partner and talking about the week.

Serving thousands and overcoming challenges

ALEX TRANTER

CEO, CATERESSENCE & POWEREZI



CaterEssence achieved two important milestones in 2023 linked to the expansion of the Group's retail food operations.

At the end of June 2023, CaterEssence mobilised a catering team to serve over 45,000 breakfast, lunch and dinner covers during July and August.

"This was a record-breaking achievement for CaterEssence in terms of the number of students being served food while residing at University of Malta Campus Hub over the summer," Alex says.

Another recent milestone achieved was on October 2, 2023 when CaterEssence took over the concession of the catering operations of the University of Malta canteen.

"This new catering activity was rebranded under the newly established 'Il-Kantin', brand which saw a complete facelift, and new catering equipment purchased and installed, as well the formation of a new catering team. All done in a record 10 working days. This operation has become the largest single retail food activity for CaterEssence serving over 1,200 students daily," he explains.

"We are actively engaged in monitoring and shaping developments in the recent national offshore energy policy"

A significant challenge faced in 2023 was the rapid and unprecedented escalation of the international price of food following the breakout of the war in Ukraine.

Key initiatives seeking to mitigate these cost increases as much as possible were linked to regular cost-control monitoring, menu optimisation, diversity of supplier base, and seeking further operational efficiencies.

"As we navigate the challenges posed by rising food costs, it is essential to recognise the direct and immediate impact on our catering expenses. Addressing this multifaceted issue has necessitated a deliberate and proactive approach that encompasses meticulous cost management and strategic supply chain optimisation," Alex says.



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what's the first thing you do?

I usually wake up around 7.30am and the first thing I do is check my emails on my phone.

What does success mean to you?

Success is multifaceted. It is a balance between achieving personal job satisfaction, cultivating a strong and healthy team, contributing towards a better future and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

What's the best business / life advice you received?

Best business advice: Don't be a busy fool!

Best personal advice: Live every day as if there is no tomorrow.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Single malt whisky.

How do you unwind?

Culinary dining, travel and physical exercise.



"In our commitment to controlling expenses, CaterEssence has undertaken a comprehensive review of its procurement and sourcing processes, seeking efficiencies and cost-saving opportunities at every juncture."

This has included renegotiating contracts with suppliers, exploring bulk purchasing options, and closely monitoring market fluctuations to secure the best possible pricing for quality ingredients.

On the front of human resource challenges, CaterEssence recognises that the recruitment landscape in the food and catering industry can be exceptionally competitive requiring a multifaceted strategy to cultivate talent and enhance the team's capabilities, fostering professional growth and development opportunities where possible.

"Seeking to overcome this challenge requires a combination of initiatives ranging from investing in training and development of current staff, creating a positive working environment to outsourcing of certain non-core functions," Alex adds.

In 2024, CaterEssence is planning to execute a robust five-year retail food strategy focused on expanding the Group's retail

food brands and expanding its outlets to cover new areas of reach around Malta.

In conjunction with this expansion in retail food outlets CaterEssence is also investing heavily in implementing retail technology platforms for faster and better process controls, while enhancing sales and customer responsiveness.

Regarding Powerezi, the commitment to the advancement of sustainable energy solutions goes beyond mere observation.

"We are actively engaged in monitoring and shaping developments in the recent national offshore energy policy published by government with a particular focus on the innovative frontier of floating wind turbines... We are actively collaborating with key stakeholders, government agencies, and industry experts to contribute to the development and deployment of cutting-edge technology in the offshore wind sector."

Powerezi is also in the process of establishing strategic partnerships with renowned foreign energy companies to leverage international expertise, share knowledge, and undertake joint ventures that span various sustainable energy sectors. ■

A large portrait of Charlo Bonnici, a middle-aged man with short grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit, light blue shirt, and blue tie. He is standing outdoors with his arms crossed, in front of a green lawn and a stone building.

From vision to reality

CHARLO BONNICI

CEO, LEARNING WORKS,
MEDITERRANEAN COLLEGE OF SPORT



Charlo has been both an observer and a key player in the education sector, with experience dating back to his top position in the Education Ministry from 2003 to 2008.

For the Mediterranean College of Sport, the past year was dedicated to the meticulous preparation of the grand opening scheduled for September 2024. This extensive groundwork involved essential steps, such as the formation of a robust senior leadership team.

Notable recruitment achievements included the appointment of Mariucca Fenech, formerly the head of St Joseph School in Sliema, as the head of MCS, and George Micallef, former head of the National Sport School, as director of sport. These appointments ensure expertise in the school's academic and sports aspects.

"We also concluded the recruitment of the assistant heads of school who will be joining in the first part of 2024, as well as running a recruitment campaign for teachers who we are currently interviewing. We also ran a campaign to recruit coaches and other technical staff, including a sport psychologist, a sport nutritionist and strength and conditioning coaches," Charlo explains.

The construction of the school, designed to accommodate up to 390 students, started once the Planning Authority building permit was issued.

Sister company Vassallo Builders undertook this endeavour, which included refurbishing the sports pavilion, constructing a new canteen, and creating state-of-the-art facilities such as a dance studio and a fitness centre, now branded as PowerLab.

The construction of a new 100-bed hostel is ready, and work on a new gymnastics hall, sports science and research centre and swimming pool are at an advanced stage. Meanwhile, construction on the new childcare centre will start soon.

The overall project is set to reach completion by early 2024.

The MCS team has actively engaged with parents and prospective student-athletes, organised meetings, and maintained connections with key stakeholders, such as the Malta Football Association, the Aquatic Sport Association of Malta and Athletics Malta, as well as with other stakeholders both in Malta and abroad to ensure a smooth kick-off.

Participating in the ICEF education fair for the first time also expanded the institution's international reach.

"We will be the first private institution to offer this kind of education at secondary and sixth form level. We hope to offer students the opportunity to achieve success in education without giving up their dream to focus and specialise in their sport."

Learning Works also had a dynamic year. While continuing to offer courses in areas such as health and social care, it expanded its offerings to include a BSc degree programme in Management, a Diploma in Sport, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Eating Disorders and Obesity.

"We also celebrated the first graduation ceremony for students achieving a Masters in International Sport Coaching, a programme run in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University," he proudly notes.

"We will be the first private institution to offer this kind of [sport] education at secondary and sixth form level"

Charlo feels that having so many public and private institutions, offering accredited courses from the very basic up to a PhD, may be challenging from a business point of view, but for the student this is a great opportunity.

"Throughout the years I have experienced so many success stories of individuals who would have stopped studying at 16 but decided to return later in life. Indeed, many individuals, mostly women, have acquired qualifications at our institution once they realised education was key to helping them move up the ladder."

Facing stiff competition in a limited student market, Learning Works has focused on offering courses aligned with market demand and maintaining high standards.

"We keep our ears to the ground to ensure we continue offering courses that are required and to adapt to remain competitive. We are a small team. However, I am very proud that each member contributes as if this was their own company." ■

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what's the first thing you do?

I wake up at 5am all week and prepare coffee for me and tea for my wife. Then most of the week I will head off to my morning run.

What does success mean to you?

Success means reaching goals you set for yourself in life. I set goals related to my work, family, and physical activity. The most satisfying type of success is one which brings about a change for the better; for yourself but especially for others.

What's the best business / life advice you received?

Make failure a part of your journey to success. If you are leading a company as CEO and business goes through a rough patch, you might start thinking of giving up. However, by analysing what went wrong, identifying the possible solutions and implementing the necessary change you will probably be back on course. The same applies to other challenges you face in life.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Eating a bar of white chocolate or a whole box of cold prickly pears.

How do you unwind?

At the end of the day, I normally unwind by watching a couple of episodes of a series (normally on Netflix), which is light in nature and preferably with a dose of humour.



CareMalta Group - the next chapter begins

JAMES SCIRIHA
CEO, CAREMALTA GROUP





Reaching 30 years in business is “no joke” and for CareMalta Group CEO James Sciriha 2023 was the culmination of all the challenges and highlights of a three decades-long journey.

CareMalta Group is now looking ahead to setting new milestones with its first foray in Gozo.

Speaking just a few months before the doors officially open at Dar San Ġuzepp in Ġhajnsielem, which he described as a “gem of a location”, James stressed the “extreme importance” of this venture for CareMalta Group.

“Presently all our energy is focused on Gozo so that we can open in the predefined timeframes. Reaching out to our sister island has been our priority for the past years. It is a huge win,” he continues.

He adds that CareMalta Group is looking forward to be the first private operator in offering care for the elderly across the channel, bringing its trademark expertise to the island. Gozo still lags behind Malta in terms of services for the elderly, as well as the disability and mental health sectors.

“I believe we can bring a complete shift to Gozo from what the Gozitans are used to in terms of nursing care and what ultimately the elderly deserve. We all deserve the best dignified service.”

Just like all CareMalta Group’s homes, Dar San Ġuzepp will create a sense of community, a “second home from home”.

“Our commitment is to deliver the best even in terms of staffing. We want to have Gozitans working with us too.”

And once that is up and running, CareMalta Group will shift its attention

to the next Gozitan project: the transformation of the former Astra discotheque into a facility that will be managed by HILA, offering a wide range of specialised services.

While this was “a very good year” for CareMalta Group with continued growth, it was not without its challenges. The award of the tender for Dar San Ġuzepp and Zammit Clapp were two major highlights of the year but both came after “very tough legal battles”.

The closure of the Bormla home was “a huge emotional challenge”.

CareMalta Group has also spent the past two years upgrading Casa Arkati’s facilities and refurbishing Villa Messina while preparing to shift all manual processes to digital.

“Reaching out to our sister island has been our priority for the past years. It is a huge win”

The elderly sector has its own inherent challenges, not least because it is becoming “more dynamic” with increased competitors entering the business, introducing new processes and motivating all operators to keep up with the latest trends. Residents are entering homes when they are older, at an average age of 83, often frailer and with more comorbidities which have a direct impact on the facilities.

Human resources are another particular challenge.

“This sector relies on employing third country nationals because we do not

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what’s the first thing you do?

I wake up between 5.30am to go running. I am a long-distance runner.

What does success mean to you?

I really don’t like speaking about personal achievements. It is always the work of the team. CareMalta is successful if we are delivering what we are expected to; if residents are happy.

What’s the best business/life advice you have ever received?

Be honest, be true, be very open with your employees. Integrity in business is extremely important.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Chocolate.

How do you unwind?

Running.

have enough Maltese to complement the full workforce. Foreigners are a very important resource to the sector and to the nation in general,” says James, adding that Learning Works trains their staff to speak basic Maltese, which helps them to communicate better with elderly residents who may not speak much English. ■

Achievements and aspirations

JANET SILVIO

CEO, HILA

This year marked the beginning of two significant operations for HILA. The first involved the operation of Dar Bjorn in Żebbuġ, where HILA earned the trust of the ALS Malta Foundation for a second time to manage their new home.

The second achievement was the inauguration of new operations at Santa Rosa, expanding respite services with a strong focus on children and adolescents. These milestones reflect HILA's commitment to meeting the evolving needs of their clients.

HILA's vision for 2024 and beyond is rooted in continuous growth, adaptation, and service expansion.

"Apart from extending our services to Gozo, HILA aims to cover even more ground, and align with the dynamic requirements of the community. We also wish to achieve more in the mental health sphere as there is so much to accomplish – this is also one of the reasons why last year I started reading for a Masters in Mental Health Studies," Janet explains.

The most significant challenge facing HILA is human resources. This is a common hurdle in the social sector, irrespective of whether it's a public, NGO, or private organisation. Finding the right people and ensuring their long-term commitment is a complex process.

"Although we have excellent and dedicated teams, the nature of the work itself demands individuals who consider the work to be a vocation. So, it takes time to find the right people and ensure their longevity within the company as the job, albeit very rewarding, can also be very challenging," she says.

HILA's strength lies in its unity, shared passion, and the intrinsic need to make a difference.

"We have encountered numerous challenges since our inception, but each obstacle has been conquered through the unity of our teams," Janet states.

"Our driving force is a collective passion for our mission – to provide the best possible quality of life to our clients. This commitment and drive have been the foundation of our success story, fostering a culture of resilience and problem-solving."

The suite of new services, policies, and legislations introduced in the disability sector since Janet started to work in this area in 2016, along with the establishment of an authority and standards, have all brought structure and direction to the industry.

"HILA has been at the forefront of innovation, driven by a client-centric approach. We have always listened to what our clients wanted and always adapted the service to them, not them to the service. This was always our prerogative and I strongly believe this is what gives us our cutting edge." ■

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What time do you wake up and what's the first thing you do?

I wake up around 5am and the first thing I do is feed my cats, followed by a coffee and some quiet time. Then I get ready to go to work and take off early to avoid traffic.

What does success mean to you?

Success is about finding and achieving the perfect balance between what you wish for and what is possible, without ever compromising your integrity, both in your personal and working life. It means doing what sparks joy within, while managing to give and get back something worthwhile in return.

What's the best business / life advice you received?

Business: Forget the 'I' in your vocabulary and use always 'WE'. Life: Embrace the gypsy within you.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

It's hard to decide between the two as they are so different: pizza and vintage designer bags. Pizza works out cheaper, that's for sure!

How do you unwind?

That depends on the day, but mainly spending time with my cats, training, de-cluttering and re-organising... and the best unwinding solution: travelling!



“Commitment and drive have been the foundation of our success story”





Integrity at the heart of Vassallo Group's work

European Parliament President Roberta Metsola was this year's guest of honour during the annual chairperson's lunch, which was the first to be hosted by Natalie Briffa Farrugia since she assumed the role in January 2023. During the event, held at the Verdala Palace, Roberta Metsola said: "People in leadership positions, cannot retreat into the comfort of repeating past initiatives, no matter how well they worked in the past. And this applies to leaders in every sphere of our society... This is how our country should be. This how the EU should be." Closing off, Natalie Briffa Farrugia said: "With boldness and enthusiasm, we are ready to keep striving for excellence in all areas where we are, or will be... Above all we will keep putting one of our most cherished values – integrity – at the heart of all we do." Vassallo Group employs over 1,900 individuals working in construction, health and social care, property management, catering and hospitality, energy, and education.



Dress down for a cause

The 2022 edition of Dress Down for Charity raised €1,450, which were presented to Rowena Enriquez, vice-president of Europa Donna Malta, which forms part the European Breast Cancer Coalition. This support group was set up in Malta to raise more awareness about breast cancer and breast health, while supporting those affected by the disease.



Il-Qaddejja tač-Ċenaklu win Nazzareno Vassallo Award 2023

This year's Nazzareno Vassallo Award went to *Il-Qaddejja Tač-Ċenaklu*, a group of nine consecrated women who have been serving God for the past 59 years and who provide care for 45 senior priests at *Id-Dar tal-Kleru* in Birkirkara. Organised jointly by Vassallo Group and CareMalta Group, the ceremony took place at San Anton Palace under the distinguished patronage of President George Vella. The selection board, chaired by former Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, included Rosette Bonello, Holger Suarez, Alexander Schembri and Keith Demicoli.



Overviewing Vassallo Group

The Vassallo Group 2022 & Beyond was held at The Malta Chamber this year. This was the first event of its kind where an overview of the Group's performance for the past year and the way forward was shared with all its financial stakeholders. Presentations were delivered by Vassallo Group Chairperson Natalie Briffa Farrugia, Vassallo Group CEO Pio Vassallo, and Group Director of Finance Stephen Borg.



Raising the bar

Vassallo Builders and Vassallo Group Realty joined forces to take part in the National Property Summit – the Mare Summit – where companies in construction and building, architecture, and real estate all came together under one roof. Vassallo Builders CEO Jonathan Buttigieg formed part of a panel themed 'Raising the bar: Achieving higher standards in the Maltese property industry' where he shared his expertise and perspectives.



TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More

Vassallo Group organised a Management Team Building event in Gozo through Outdoor Living Malta: Teambuilding & Adventure, where employees came together through various activities. The mission brought out the competitiveness in individuals who set out to finish first and win the challenge, but the main winner was teamwork.

Rethinking Youth Athlete Development

The Mediterranean College of Sport recently held a two-day conference titled 'Rethinking Youth Athlete Development: A Holistic Approach', which brought together industry leaders, experts, professionals, coaches, parents and athletes dedicated to holistic youth athlete development. The conference provided a platform for attendees to engage in thought-provoking discussions, gain valuable insights, and network with peers and thought leaders.





Safety is top priority

Vassallo Builders is continuously ensuring its health and safety measures are up to date and this year it carried out a successful evacuation drill at the Mediterranean College of Sport building site. This crucial exercise highlighted the significance of practising emergency procedures on building sites. By preparing for unforeseen events, it prioritised the well-being of its workers and fostered a culture of preparedness.



Kick-off for a cause

The Vassallo Group Football Tournament held at the Mediterranean College of Sport brought together teams, players, and spectators in support of a noble cause. Amid fierce competition, the spirit of giving shone bright, as every goal scored and every tackle made contributed to a greater purpose.



A fresh intake

The orientation week for new students starting life at the University of Malta is always an exciting time and this year the Campus Hub Pjazza was buzzing with students, games and events held throughout the week.



Merging sport with academia

The Mediterranean College of Sport and Hudson Group, a renowned international retailer and distributor specialising in sportswear, officially announced their partnership at a momentous event held at the Sports Pavilion, St Aloysius College. This collaboration signifies a groundbreaking alliance that merges academic prowess and sporting accomplishment.





Team building

The Vassallo Group Realty staff enjoyed a team building event out at sea on a hot summer day.



Time to tuck in

The employees and management of Vassallo Builders came together at the Mediterranean College of Sport for their annual *majjalata* celebration before the August summer shutdown. This is the Group's way of expressing gratitude for the hard work and dedication of its team who work tirelessly to lay a strong foundation for all the projects.

Dancing the night away

CaterEssence staff closed off the summer with a party at *ir-Razzett l-Abjad* in Iklin where they danced and enjoyed a well-deserved fun evening following a busy and productive summer.



A touch of pink

This year, Vassallo Group employees wore a touch of pink for Dress Down Day to raise funds for breast cancer awareness. Employees donated money or up to a day's pay, while a Bake Sale was organised with the support of CaterEssence.



Team sport

The Sports Pavilion at St Aloysius was officially inaugurated following extensive refurbishment and addition of new facilities. This project is part of a major investment in sport facilities within the complex as a result of a joint venture between St Aloysius College and the Vassallo Group. The whole project is expected to be completed by October 2024.



Stellar operations

The home managers and teams working at CareMalta's facilities and HILA's homes were rewarded for their dedication and hard work they provided to residents and clients during 2022. CareMalta Group ensures that improvement in the service offered is monitored to assure a high standard of performance by carrying out audits in all its operations.



Integrating care solutions

'Designing and Implementing Integrated Care Solutions, Challenges, and Opportunities' was the theme of a workshop sponsored by CareMalta Group. It was organised by the Department of Health Systems Management and Leadership, within the University of Malta, with Prof. Axel Kaehne from the Health Services Research, Medical School, Edge Hill University, as keynote speaker.



Dispelling myths

'Dementia-friendly hospitals: A myth or reality?' was the theme of a seminar and report that was supported by CareMalta Group, in collaboration with two NGOs – the Maltese Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, and the Malta Dementia Society – and two University of Malta Departments, the Gerontology & Dementia Studies, and Nursing and the Faculty for Social Wellbeing and Faculty of Health Sciences.



Tailor-made services for youngsters

Santa Rosa, in Mosta, was inaugurated on May 24 by Julia Farrugia Portelli, Minister for Inclusion, Voluntary Organisations and Consumer Rights. Santa Rosa – an investment where the government provides necessary services through *Aġenzija Support* – offers tailor-made services for children, adolescents and young adults.



Celebrating CareMalta's heroes

The management extended its heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the incredible employees of CareMalta Group during an event at Villa Amodeo in Mosta, as part of the Group's 30th anniversary celebrations.



Procession of respect

CareMalta Group marked the International Day for Older Persons with a procession that led to the magnificent Basilica of Santa Marija Assunta. This symbolic journey emphasised the significance of older persons in our society, and underlined the respect and honor they deserved.



The way of beauty

CareMalta Group launched Antonio Mifsud's exquisite art exhibition – The Way of Beauty – which featured sacred narratives from clay tablets dedicated to the 14 facilities and homes of CareMalta and HILA. Organised in collaboration with ZVART, a Vassallo Group initiative geared to promote works of art within all the Group's facilities, the event was held at the Archbishop's Palace in Valletta.

Leaders in care for 30 years

CareMalta Group celebrated the 30th anniversary from its inception on August 1, with an event at Casa Arkati, in Mosta, where it had all started in 1993. Today the Group cares for over 1,600 residents and employs a workforce of over 1,400 highly dedicated and well-trained personnel.



Exploring ethical challenges in ageing and dementia

Ageing and dementia were the topics of two seminars held in October by the Faculty for Social Wellbeing – University of Malta, Department of Gerontology & Dementia Studies in collaboration with CareMalta Group. The seminars explored the ethical principles of care, particularly in the context of dementia and the pursuit of autonomy in old age.



Walking for mental health

CareMalta and HILA teamed up to organise a walk in Ta' Qali for residents and clients from different facilities and homes to create awareness about World Mental Health Day. For the event clients from Casal Nuovo prepared handmade tokens for all the participants. TAASC Malta representatives also joined the walk.

Women and leadership

Vassallo Group is proud to be making strides in equality at the workplace, with 16 per cent of CEOs, 49 per cent of managers and 59 per cent of executives being women. These figures were shared by Group CEO Pio Vassallo during a Women's Day Event at The Chamber of Commerce with the theme, 'Are we there yet? Perspectives on Women & Leadership'. The discussion delved into women's role in society, how it has changed, evolved and what we still need to work on as a society to find a balance between men and women, in particular at the workplace. Lydia Abela, the wife of Malta's Prime Minister, was the guest of honour. During the event, Vassallo Group Chairperson Natalie Briffa Farrugia said women should be more involved in the decision-making process at the workplace and beyond.



Collaborating through sport

The Aquatic Sports Association of Malta and the Mediterranean College of Sport signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to collaborate in various areas, including coaching, sport development, sport research and sport science, as well as exchange programmes. The two entities agreed that the ASA national team coaches – Milan Cirovic (water polo), Delon Dannhauser (swimming) and Michelle Hubner (artistic swimming) – will also be head coaches at MCS for their respective sport disciplines. The school will open its doors in September 2024.



One Group, one family

The year 2022 saw the return of Vassallo Group's Christmas Party after a forced break brought about by the Covid pandemic. The event was held at Villa Arrigo, with entertainment provided by Relikc.



Tuck in

CaterEssence is proud to have taken over the Canteen at the University of Malta and renamed it *Il-Kantin*.

Recharging together

The work-life balance is highly valued at Vassallo Group, and before the Santa Marija shutdown in August, its team and the management, came together for a delightful BBQ event at the Head Office to relax and recharge.





Celebrating employees

Vassallo Group's Arkati Foundation Day was held with the aim of raising awareness about the Foundation and to thank employees for their participation and support. Group Chairperson Natalie Briffa Farrugia, Group CEO Pio Vassallo together with Chief People Officer Lee Xuereb and other employees visited various locations of Vassallo Group to mark the day. The Arkati Foundation is an employee solidarity fund geared to safeguard the safety and well-being of employees experiencing difficult times.



Laying the foundations

Vassallo Builders is committed to certifying all its employees working on all its construction projects and this year, it proudly presented skill cards to its employees who conquered the Brick Laying Course, following a partnership with the Group's education arm Learning Works, a licensed VNFIL centre.



The Arkati Foundation Financial Statements 30 November 2022

Income and Expenditure Account

Year ended 30 November 2022

	Note	2022 €	2021 €
Income			
Donations		52,350	54,380
Investment gains		18,442	18,392
Gross income		70,792	72,772
Fees and charges		(1,781)	(4,525)
Tax at source		(1,464)	(2,126)
Excess of income over expenditure		67,547	66,121

Allocated to:

Accumulated funds		33,774	33,061
Distributable fund	5	33,773	33,060
		67,547	66,121

Statement of Affairs

30 November 2022

	Note	2022 €	2021 €
ASSETS AND LIABILITIES			
Non-current assets			
Financial assets	6	329,573	313,534
Current assets			
Loans receivable	7	210,000	165,000
Other receivables		11,613	7,115
Cash and cash equivalents		43,894	48,364
		265,507	220,479
Total assets		595,080	534,013

Funds and liabilities

Funds

Capital fund	8	11,647	11,647
Distributable fund	5	66,901	66,256
Accumulated fund	9	449,144	387,666
		527,692	465,569

Liabilities

Current liabilities

Accruals		487	2,188
Distributable income		66,901	66,256
		67,388	68,444

Net funds and liabilities		595,080	534,013
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These financial statements were approved by the board members, authorised for issue on 31 July 2023 and signed on its behalf by:

Joe Saliba
President

Pio Vassallo
Member

VASSALLO GROUP

Nicole Galea Digital Marketing Executive
John Grima Stock & Inventory Controller
Alessia Casha Payroll Officer

Melanie Pace HR Manager
Ile Ivanov Software Support Analyst
Graziella Busuttil Procurement Executive

VASSALLO BUILDERS

Ryan Portelli Contracts Manager
Sarah-Jane Scicluna Structural Engineer
Lacey Aquilina Accounts Executive
Konstantin Vladimirov Konstantinov Quantity Surveyor
Julian Andres Osorio Tejada Clerk of Works

Simo Karaivanov Charge Hand
Anderson David Yances Buelvas Subcontract Manager
Thomas Gatt Plant And Logistic Manager
Ivelin Kolev Dimitrov Civil Works Foreman

CAREMALTA GROUP

Claire Coldman Services Manager
Zvetlana Debono Nursing Manager
Alicianne Scicluna Allied Health Specialist
Shirley Turner Facility Administrative Assistant
Ritianne Borg Group Executive Assistant
Bojana Deljanin Lead Carer
Romina Apap Assistant Facility Manager
Isabelle Abela Facility Administrative Assistant

Elisa Camilleri Human Resources Manager
John Sciberras Facility Manager
Maria Housley Human Resources Executive
Amanda Bajada Finance Manager
Kimberly Buhagiar Human Resources Executive
Asha Kirar Lead Nurse
Fredirose Cacho Bulaclac Care Administrator
Joanna Farrugia Training & Development Executive

CATERESSENCE

Lisa Bugeja Sous Chef
Walid Masri Mosbah Zumyat Junior Sous Chef
Leanne Cassar Operations Support Executive
Roy Gopal Tournant Chef
Manuel Francisco Rivero Calles Operations Support Services Supervisor

Leidy Marcela Aranda Gonzalez Cake Box Operations Executive
Katerina Cihakova Catering Services Manager
Evans Beinomugisha Catering Services Coordinator
Christopher Camilleri Supply Chain Manager
Huwida Sadek Aiyad Ben Said Cake Box Brand Manager
Clint Shead Catering Services Manager

VASSALLO GROUP REALTY

Audrey Muscat Executive Assistant to the CEO

Maria Jose Rivero Administration Executive

CAMPUS HUB

Maxine Formosa Grupetta Marketing and Communications Executive
Andrea Maria Nino Accounts Clerk

Petar Pocuc Maintenance Team Leader
Andreina Gusmary Agreda Torres Sales & Reservations Agent

LEARNING WORKS

Marina Mifsud Administrative Assistant

Mikele Vella Student Recruitment and Marketing Executive

MEDITERRANEAN COLLEGE OF SPORT

Henry Bray Sports Facility Manager

Mariucca Fenech Head of School

The dynamic landscape of HR in 2023

LEE XUEREB

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, VASSALLO GROUP



Employee turnover is a common concern in the field of human resources, and Lee Xuereb, Chief People Officer at Vassallo Group, acknowledges that this continues to be a significant challenge in 2023.

One of the most pressing challenges, he says, has been sourcing the right human capital for the Group's various companies; a challenge that has been exacerbated over the past 12 to 18 months due to fierce competition.

"The changing attitude towards work, with a shift from having a job with a sense of meaning to one more focused on making money and enjoying life (outside of work), has influenced the market's volatility. In addition, industry-wide competition for the same resources has driven up recruitment costs, compounded by rising living expenses," he explains.

While highlighting the importance of providing training and qualifications to employees, Lee acknowledges the important work that Learning Works does to upskill team members within Vassallo Group. This ensures they have the necessary tools and certifications to meet the Group's evolving needs.

As Vassallo Group relies heavily on foreign employees, government policies and practices play a crucial role in shaping its HR strategies. Lee stresses the need to adapt to these policies by ensuring the recruitment function aligns with regulations.

"For example, we focus on timely documentation and maintaining up-to-date identity cards to comply with government requirements, while fostering a harmonious relationship with the authorities."

In 2023, Vassallo Group implemented new IT systems in HR management, introducing a time and attendance system, as well as a new payroll system after extensive consultation and research, revolutionising attendance measurement and streamlining processes such as leave applications.

The Group aims to have its full implementation in place by the end of Q1 next year. Additionally, it plans to extend the use of these systems to digitalise documentation, enhance employee interaction, and facilitate direct communication with the workforce.

"The strong relationships built between the various HR teams have been instrumental in providing unwavering support"

From a personal perspective, Lee emphasises the challenges he has faced in managing HR teams within the Group, particularly when a leadership transition occurs. He underscores the importance of his team's support, allowing him to seamlessly step in and out of different teams as needed.

"This is essential for maintaining the Group's HR functions effectively, despite the limitations of my time. The strong relationships built between the various HR teams have been instrumental in providing this unwavering support," he smiles.

Finally, Lee is clearly proud of the Shine Awards, an annual celebration of employees and their achievements, part of Vassallo Group's commitment to fostering a thriving workforce.

"This year, we included an external judge to ensure objective selections and revised categories for a fairer distribution of recognition across different companies within the Group. As for next year... we have a few surprises in store!" ■



Sustaining a dual career system

GEORGE MICALLEF

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT & RECRUITMENT
DIRECTOR, MEDITERRANEAN COLLEGE OF SPORT

George Micallef was the very first employee of the new Mediterranean College of Sport, and from the get-go knew the task required a two-person effort.

"If there is anything I learnt from my experience as head of the National Sport School between 2012 and 2018, is that when it comes to administering a college of this stature, there should be at least two people taking the lead: one focusing on the sports aspect and the other on academia," he says.

"This backs our belief in a sustainable dual career system where a student's progress in sports is not detrimental to their academic achievement. We warn guardians and parents that at such a young age, they cannot gamble everything on sports, especially because of how challenging it is in Malta to ensure a sustainable professional career in just sports."

The work and excitement are both ramping up as the college is set to welcome its first cohort of secondary school students and sixth formers in September 2024.

"The coaching philosophy of MCS will be based on long-term athlete development"

In the meantime, George is working on recruiting coaches who are not linked to local clubs to ensure no conflict of interest, sports science professionals and a medical team. All staff members will take decisions on each student together, to optimise athletes' full potential.

He is also working on recruiting students, which is no mean feat for a fee-paying school, ensuring parents or guardians understand they will be getting their money's worth.

Here, George is focusing on attracting the best potential, rather than the best talent, as he knows all too well that junior success is no guarantee for senior success.

Although he was officially appointed Director of Sports Development and Recruitment in March 2022, George started investing his efforts in the college three years prior as a consultant to MCS CEO Charlo Bonnici.

Together, they worked on a plan to foster a culture that encourages collaboration between stakeholders, including guardians, parents, other schools, clubs and associations linked to football, aquatic sports and athletics.

What will set the college apart?

The coaching philosophy of MCS will be based on long-term athlete development through age-appropriate training, individualised development plans and inquiry-based learning. The college will also introduce the concept of bio-banding and prioritise sports science. ■

Sports meets education at new college

MARIUCCIA FENECH

HEAD, MEDITERRANEAN COLLEGE OF SPORT



“Students should be the best they can be, both at school and in sports”

When the first school assembly is held in September 2024 at the Mediterranean College of Sport in Birkirkara it will not only mark Vassallo Group’s official introduction into secondary and sixth form education, but it will also be the first day of a revolutionary form of education, at least for Malta.

“When I was a student, the school I attended stopped any form of physical exercise at Form 3,” recounts Mariuccia Fenech the newly-appointed head of school at MCS.

Now, students are no longer forced to make a choice between sports and education. “The main difference is that MCS will offer both academic education and sports on an equal level.”

With two football pitches, athletics track and swimming pool on site, MCS offers training in football, athletics, swimming, waterpolo and artistic swimming, alongside the full school curriculum.

The independent school is both a secondary and sixth form college catering for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years. It will initially open with around 100 to 140 students in years 7, 8 and 9 and lower sixth form, and will grow slowly over the following five years to a maximum population of 270 students in secondary school and 60 in sixth form.

“Our intention is not to be a big school. We want to emphasise quality over quantity. Such a specialised school needs to be very individualised.”

The college will adopt an inquiry-based teaching and learning approach and the timetable will follow a managed pace to ensure students can keep up with their training and class work.

“Our idea is to ensure our student athletes will grow into adults who have the ability to take up a dual career or have the necessary capabilities to choose their path with an open mind.”

This innovative teaching approach demanded an equally innovative and rigorous recruitment process of teachers who share this teaching philosophy “and, importantly, have the right attitude”.

Parents of prospective students have been intrigued by the college. “They ask a lot about how we plan to juggle the curriculum, the level of staff and what guarantees can they have that their child would fit in after being uprooted from another school.”

Will the college spawn a new Olympic star?

“For me the best measure of success is if I see my students grow into adults who can live a good satisfying life, whatever the path they take. It is important to be realistic. They should be the best they can be, both at school and in sports. That is the aim of this college.” ■

Aligning goals across multiple facets

CARLO AQUILINA

CHIEF CORPORATE SERVICES OFFICER & CHIEF
INFORMATION OFFICER, VASSALLO GROUP



Carlo Aquilina deftly manages the dual responsibilities of CCSO and CIO, each with its distinct challenges and objectives to drive innovation and corporate responsibility within the Group.

In his capacity as CCSO, Carlo's primary mission is to align the support functions offered by Vassallo Group with its overarching goals. He feels this role is essential for maintaining the Group's overall health, efficiency, compliance and reputation.

As CIO, he spearheads the Group's digital initiatives, pushing the boundaries of technology and fostering innovation.

"The role of CIO has evolved significantly in recent years, moving beyond merely managing the IT Infrastructure to becoming a strategic business partner," he says.

"In the role of CIO, I am involved in driving innovation, digital transformation and helping the Group adapt to the changing tech landscape. The role of CCSO consumes most of my time, however, I have my mind at rest when it comes to IT as this is manned by a very talented team."

The convergence of these two roles is evident in their shared commitment to communication, collaboration, and aligning goals across multiple facets, such as IT services, security, risk management, policy development, and digital transformation. This synergy is a cornerstone of Vassallo Group's efficient operation and forward-looking approach.

Carlo also oversees the Group's commitment to embrace Environment, Social, and Governance factors as project leader. ESG embodies the Group's commitment to responsible business practices and sustainability.

"Our ESG implementation strategy is well structured, involving phases such as assessment and commitment, decarbonisation initiatives, taxonomy assessment, and ESRS implementation. Our goal is to promote sustainability and responsible business practices that create long-term value for all stakeholders, including

shareholders, employees and the environment, while minimising negative impacts," he says.

Reflecting on the journey, Carlo acknowledges the significant challenges his team has confronted and surmounted.

Migrating the entire Group to the cloud within six months and maintaining cybersecurity and data privacy compliance have been formidable undertakings. Carlo highlights the resilient teamwork that powered the successful execution of these projects.

One common challenge the team faces is the rapidly evolving technological landscape, which necessitates keeping the Group's workforce skilled and aligned.

"Still, as significant as the challenges might be, we always collaborate as a Group through effective leadership and strategic planning and make sure these 'challenges' – actually I prefer the word 'opportunities' – are successfully achieved." ■

"Significant as the challenges might be, we always collaborate as a Group"



A new horizon for businesses in Europe

Sustainability is no longer just a recent buzzword; it's a crucial objective in today's ever-changing world of business and corporate responsibility. **Antoine Fenech**, Audit & Assurance Director at Deloitte Malta, shares his insights with *Arkati*.

At the forefront of the EU's sustainability efforts is the European Green Deal, a comprehensive strategy aiming for climate neutrality by 2050, aligning with the Paris Agreement's goal to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. This commitment focuses on reducing emissions and transitioning to a greener and more circular economy.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic brought the world to a halt, offering a unique opportunity to witness the wonders of nature, as human activity slowed down. With reduced land and sea traffic, pollution, cleaner air, and improved water quality, we could witness the positive impact in such a short space of time. The environment's ability to rejuvenate left us in surprise, emphasising the positive potential of sustainability when we give nature a chance to bounce back.

The EU has introduced several rules and legislation, including CSRD, EU Taxonomy and SFDR, to drive businesses towards more sustainable operations. These represent a paradigm shift in how businesses need to disclose the impact of their operations, encouraging them to reduce their carbon footprint and add value through sustainable practices. This information will be subject to audits, which will increase robustness and reliability of this data and reduce the risk of false claims, also referred to as 'greenwashing'.

By way of example, the construction industry is starting to move towards more environment-friendly practices, energy-efficient designs, and a greater focus on sustainable materials. The same can be said about other industry sectors, which are also moving towards more sustainable and circular practices.

These changes provide stakeholders and individuals with more data on business practices and their impact. Investors can also use this data to direct capital toward more sustainable enterprises aligned to their values. Similarly, private individuals are increasingly

choosing products and services from companies aligned with their ethical values.

Malta has also embarked on this journey with new initiatives to protect and reduce the impact on the environment.

Some local examples include the new solar farm in Ta' Qali, which generates clean and sustainable energy for over 350 households; Malta Public Transport invested €20 million in electrifying its entire fleet and buses; and the government recently released its strategy around offshore renewable energy projects aiming to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Private companies are also investing in solar energy, as well as the electrification of their car fleets, and other measures that reduce the carbon footprint of their buildings and operations.

Vassallo Group is not new to green philosophy, with some key projects being Campus Hub 'Bubble Deck' construction, which aims to reduce concrete and CO2 emissions in the building, as well as its involvement in the Malta North Waste Treatment Plant to produce biogas later used for the creation of renewable electricity.

Additionally, Vassallo Group has been investing heavily in the production of solar energy through Powerezi Ltd, which is responsible for the extensive solar plants by using roof space to produce energy. This is testament to Vassallo Group's commitment to decarbonise its operations throughout the sectors within which it operates.

Uncontrolled business growth over the last years and the negative impact this has had on environment led to more floods, heatwaves, deforestation, and other environmental catastrophes.

However, embracing sustainability offers businesses and individuals the opportunity to positively influence our shared future. Success stories worldwide demonstrate that sustainable practices can lead to an improved quality of life as well as better financial well-being. ■

"Vassallo Group is not new to green philosophy"



Urban Hotels: value for money, with style

MALCOLM AZZOPARDI

GM, URBAN HOTELS

When The George hotel first opened in St Julian's in 2010, it heralded a new concept in Malta's tourist product as a mid-size property with a design aspect and lifestyle feel.

Fast forward to today and the island is awash with boutique hotels, while larger properties keep getting even bigger. Despite this saturated market, each of the three Urban Hotels properties stand out as they have managed to carve a particular niche as mid-size accommodation in the upper 4-star price bracket, where the focus is on value for money.

"We try to survive in the saturated market because our hotels are not too large, we can fill them up pretty quickly, and we really try to focus on value for money. We focus on small, but good," says Urban Hotels manager Malcolm Azzopardi from his "small table with lots of coffee" in his office at The George.

Each property has its own USP and target clientele. While The George set the standard as a "breath of fresh air" with its cool decor, Number Eleven in Paceville took it a step further where the lobby was abolished and replaced by a funky bar atmosphere.

Meanwhile, Lands End in Sliema with its no-expenses spared marble, natural wood and high-end quality furniture attracts an older clientele. In all three properties originality is key.

"What other hotels do, we make sure we don't do. We do it differently."

Established in 2007 as a joint venture between Vassallo Group and Claret Property Investments Ltd, Urban Hotels will now be joining Accor group by listing Number Eleven as part of the Handwritten Collection, which gathers "charming and stylish places".

"The agreement means the hotel will be able to tap into Accor's 86 million members while remaining independent."

This was the first full year of operation for all three properties with summer registering occupancies "exceeding expectations", despite increasing rates to make up for higher inflation and operational costs.

In the next three years Urban Hotels will be seeking to consolidate the cooperation agreement with Accor, refurbish and upgrade The George and explore opportunities to manage properties built by third parties.

Is there room for more hotels in Malta?

"In peak times we cannot grow anymore. The infrastructure cannot take it. We can grow off-season but we need to have better product development and investment," says Malcolm, adding that the eco-contribution is far too low and there is potential for increasing, which should be spent on urban embellishments. ■

"What other hotels do, we make sure we don't do. We do it differently"

Balance demand with sustainable growth

Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association CEO **Andrew Agius Muscat** shares his perspectives on Malta's tourism industry and outlook for 2024 with *Arkati*.

Malta had a record-breaking summer. What do you believe contributed to these numbers?

In 2020, Malta had been destined to have a bumper year for tourism then Covid exploded the world over, dealing a huge blow to the industry. Now, we're experiencing an international trend of revenge tourism and travel is even stronger, in spite of the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine. 2019 was the benchmark for record numbers and we're expecting to surpass this in 2023. We now need to critically analyse whether this is the fruit of revenge tourism, and if these numbers can, or should, be maintained. Right now, the geopolitical situation is leading to inflation, while purchasing power is being eaten into. The government has so far stepped in to absorb the rising costs of fuel, but what will the impact be once the subsidies tap is turned off? These are the parameters we need to be prepared for; luckily, as an island we're small enough to be able to adjust our strategies to react quickly to the changing environment.

Are these numbers sustainable?

Last year, we commissioned Deloitte to do a capacity-carrying exercise, which established that Malta will need to attract 4.7 million tourists a year by 2027 – each staying just under seven nights – to prevent the oversupply of accommodation becoming a serious issue. This study gives us all a clear picture of the situation, indicating that if the numbers continue increasing we'll require heavier investment in the infrastructure, be it sewage, water and electricity supplies, among others. Growth has to be managed, and decision-makers need to recognise Malta's size and manage the numbers to ensure tourism remains viable and sustainable.

What are you envisaging for the year ahead?

The elephant in the room for 2024 is whether the war between Israel and Hamas will remain contained or spread



across the region. From a completely clinical perspective, if it remains concentrated in the area, tourism will remain strong. Connectivity is key for Malta; our only bridge to the rest of Europe is by air and sea, so we will be watching closely to see how the closure of Air Malta will play out.

The MHRA spoke about the need to take courageous political decisions. What do you believe are the most pressing points?

Post-covid recovery remains stronger than originally predicted, mainly due to collective efforts. However, our industry is facing impending challenges, including overcapacity, so it is critical for the relevant authorities to ensure there is a balance between demand and sustainable growth. Furthermore, new regulations,

such as the Green Deal and the EU emissions directives, will all impact Malta's tourism sector making it increasingly vital for the government to ensure a just and responsible transition. With regard to the spreading conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, we will experience further increases in costs, decreases in purchasing power for potential tourists and disruptions in travel sentiment. This will put further pressure on the government and the tourism sector on how best to manage this dynamic and critical situation.

What is your vision for the tourism sector?

I believe we urgently need to all come together to refine our strategies and focus on a better tourism product to ensure quality tourism. ■



**BEST SUPERVISOR AWARD -
CAMPUS HUB**
FEDERICO DALLAMANO



**BEST SUPERVISOR AWARD -
CAREMALTA**
BRIAN CALLEJA



**BEST SUPERVISOR AWARD -
CATERESSENCE**
CHRISTIAN ABDILLA



**BEST SUPERVISOR AWARD -
HILA**
BILJANA DRMANOVIC



**BEST SUPERVISOR AWARD -
VASSALLO BUILDERS**
JOSEPH SAMMUT



**BEST SUPERVISOR AWARD -
VASSALLO GROUP REALTY**
MARIO BORG



**BEST EMPLOYEE AWARD -
CAMPUS HUB**
DEJAN ANDELKOVIC



**BEST EMPLOYEE AWARD -
CAREMALTA**
SIMON CUSCHIERI



**BEST EMPLOYEE AWARD -
CATERESSENCE**
FABIANA VELLA



**BEST EMPLOYEE AWARD -
HILA**
FATIMA TINIO



**BEST EMPLOYEE AWARD -
VASSALLO BUILDERS**
DAVID BUTTIGIEG



BEST TEAM AWARD
SCAFFOLDING SECTION



BEST NEWCOMER AWARD

MARK BORG



BEST NEWCOMER AWARD

SHELJO ANTONY



BEST MANAGER AWARD

MICHAEL PISANI



**CUSTOMER FOCUS AWARD -
CAREMALTA**

CATHY VELLA



**CUSTOMER FOCUS AWARD -
CATERESSENCE**

LEANNE CASSAR



**CUSTOMER FOCUS AWARD -
HILA**

KIM FALZON



**CUSTOMER FOCUS AWARD -
VASSALLO BUILDERS**

JOHN ZAMMIT



**BRAND AMBASSADOR
AWARD**

ALEX BORG



**BRAND AMBASSADOR
AWARD**

MIKELE VELLA



**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
AWARD**

LISA BUGEJA



SERVICE QUALITY AWARD

DONNA BARTOLO



**TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT
AWARD**

DEROME AGIUS



VASSALLO BUILDERS

5 YEARS

Carmelo Mercieca
Daniel Amoah
Ebenezer Djan
Jaspal Jaspal
Ann Marie Chircop
Kevin Tonna
Francis Kumtsiah

10 YEARS

Anthony Bartolo
Kevin Drew
James Cristina
Roderick Spiteri

15 YEARS

Emanuel Bellizzi
Edwin Gatt
Joseph Borg
Ivan Milivojevic

20 YEARS

Francis Tanti
John Schembri

25 YEARS

Leo Galea

30 YEARS

Mario Cassar
Piero Laudizio
Jonathan Buttigieg

35 YEARS

Emanuel Tonna
Joseph Tonna

VASSALLO GROUP

10 YEARS

Dr Charlene Vella Vassallo

15 YEARS

Charlo Bonnici

30 YEARS

Audrey Galea

HILA

30 YEARS

Dorothy Inguanuez

CATERESSENCE

10 YEARS

Richard Littlejohn
Albert Kojo Adjei
Chernet Tassew
Rita Saliba

30 YEARS

Ing. Alexander Tranter

VASSALLO GROUP REALTY

5 YEARS

Paul Vassallo
Mark Ciantar

15 YEARS

Perit Ruben Vassallo

CAREMALTA

5 YEARS

Ildiko Vajner
Naomi Camilleri
Mariano Ricka Gem
Jini Antony
Francis Ernest Ubay
Jennifer Cutajar
Janette Cassar
Nikolina Petrovic
Mary Joy Pinero Embate
Cozynette Julve Ruelan
Abegail Edaga Legados
Verlyn Nisnisan Samson
Lim Puebla Barrosa
Ma. Irish Nalzarzo Guintibano
Lany Serrano Reyes
Bilsy Mary Varghese
Maria Joseph
Manuel Aby
Alpha Varghese
Chinju Thankachan
Francis Farrugia
Jezalyn Prima Salamero
Teena Varkey
Cherian Poonelil Nyjis
Midhu John Manavalan
Bincy Mary Babu
Linu Thanattukudy Baby
Linta Mathew
Mary Grace Maranion Gumpad
Marife Gomez Mamac
Tintumol Mathew
Adrian Demanuele Farrugia
Biljana Drmanovic
Herminia Torreon Dolino
Ruby Anne Manzano De Vera
Maya Jimenez Alesna
Fatima Jed San Pedro
Deepa Manoj
Nivya Varghese
Ann Raides J Ganados
Ismaila Olohundare Wahab
Aleksandra Prokic
Anvy Vimal
Nedka Kostova
Georgeta Baci
Joicy Jovi
Juffry Tabal Castillon
Fregie Grace Rodriguez Mariano
Adriana Gauci
Emanuel Tabone
Jo Ann Bonita
Darren Gregory
Alfredo Turco
Michael Vella
Rose Sultana
Liyamol Areeparambil Sandhyavu
Linsa Palatty Poulouse
Nheriza Aguinod Garcia
Jenifer Laro Faustorilla
Sony Jose
Jeenamol Parackal Chacko
Jimmy Sumili Salig
Femia Galeon
Elezebeth Varghese
Emma Amisola Sinag
Doris Abela
Soniya Mathew
Jolsana George
Vivian Psaila

Roland Juarez Gelasque
Emelia Miraveles Sedrome
Gladis Cecille Bacor Pahapay
Emilido Esterlita
Norielee Bundoc Galvez
Eddie Jaime Lagasca
Sabrina Xuereb
Anna Galea Todorova
Elaine Degiorgio
Josianne Grech
Jocelyn Farrugia
Maria Teresa Cruz Garces
Jincy James
Diana Mae Amante Padilla
Taciaa Abe Gatarin
Glenda Gatchalian Fiott
Michelle Mugas Paz
Petya Kovacheva
Helana Mani

10 YEARS

Laetitia Alessandro
Charmaine Grech
Nicholas Zampa
Doreen Xuereb
Kelly Pulis
Josephine Pace
Jane Rosemary Hudsun
Maria Farrugia
Yasmine Seguna
Rita Cauchi
Sharon Tanti
Josette Aguis
Yolanda Grixti
Kathleen Fenech
Karen Abela
Anna Montebello

15 YEARS

Claudia Tanti
Rose Mallia
Lorraine Damato
Jason Agius
Josette Micallef
Christiana Curmi Bonanno
Karen Vella
Shirley Turner
Jacqueline Al Yasin
Catherine Galea
Benigna Fava
Roslyn Brincat

20 YEARS

Maria Borg
Simone Borg
Michael Zerafa
Doris Chircop

25 YEARS

Irene Simiana
Miriam Scerri
James Buttigieg
Maria Anna Farrugia



Fatima Tinio



David Buttigieg



Dejan Andelkovic

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE: MEET THE FIVE OUTSTANDING WINNERS OF THE BEST EMPLOYEE AWARDS

It's not every day employees receive awards that signify their outstanding performance and commitment to their roles. These remarkable individuals are being recognised for their unwavering dedication and commitment to their roles within the various companies under the Vassallo Group. Each one of these exceptional team members contributes to the companies' success in their own way, making them true assets. Their work ethic has earned them well-deserved recognition. They are all examples of what can be achieved through hard work, dedication, and a passion for making a difference.

Fatima Tinio, David Buttigieg, Dejan Andelkovic, Fabiana Vella, and Simon Cuschieri are the shining stars who recently received the Best Employee Awards, and they each have unique stories to tell.



Fabiana Vella



Simon Cuschieri

Fatima Tinio's role in HILA involves assisting clients with daily living, making each day fulfilling and rewarding. She says that receiving the award was a deeply personal achievement, reflecting the respect, support, and trust she has earned.

Her compassion, courage, commitment, and reliability shine through her work. She's not just a good communicator and listener but also someone who remains calm in challenging situations.

Fatima says that receiving the award was a deeply personal achievement, reflecting the respect, support, and trust she has earned.

"The award meant the world to me. The joy and gratitude expressed by the clients I support can be immeasurably rewarding, making each day on the job incredibly fulfilling. Seeing them happy every day gives me the energy to do my job. I am passionate in helping others especially my colleagues, and making sure each day is a good one for everyone."

As a panel beater, spray painter (and so much more) with Vassallo Builders for the past 29 years, **David Buttigieg's** commitment to doing exceptional work has been instrumental in his success.

His trustworthiness, self-reliance, and the respect he commands among his

peers make him a truly outstanding employee.

"I love creating something from 'nothing'. Seeing something coming to fruition is so satisfying. It felt very good to be appreciated. Receiving the award filled me with pride and a sense of being appreciated. It's a testament to the hard work I have put into my role."

Part of the Campus Hub maintenance team, **Dejan Andelkovic** values accuracy, responsibility, and loyalty to work, which has led to his well-deserved recognition.

His enthusiasm for maintenance work and his quick reactions to unpredictable situations make him a standout team member.

"I believe in the power of trust, and I attribute my award to the harmonious team environment. I would like to thank my superiors, the Campus Hub maintenance team, and all employees of the company."

As a sales representative for CaterEssence, **Fabiana Vella** excels at promoting products and ensuring customer satisfaction. Her heartfelt approach to her work is reflected in her clients' satisfaction.

She says that she values the confidence she has gained throughout her

five years with the company, acknowledging that her commitment and approach to her work have been key to her success.

Fabiana says that the nomination for the award was a significant moment in her career, making her feel appreciated for the years she dedicated to the company.

"Whatever I do, I give my all and do it from my heart. I felt honoured just by being nominated. It definitely boosted my confidence and further solidified my commitment to my role! Seeing clients satisfied and sales growing motivates me to excel further."

A customer service professional with CareMalta, **Simon Cuschieri's** constant pursuit of improvement has contributed to his success; he is always striving to provide the best service to residents, relatives, and colleagues. He says his manager's feedback has been a crucial element in his continuous improvement.

Simon's unwavering commitment to excellence, going the extra mile to assist his colleagues, sets him apart.

"My greatest satisfaction is when I get words of praise from customers, colleagues, and my manager. The fact that my superiors delegate other tasks to me, apart from my normal job, motivates me to continue to excel in my work." ■

CELEBRATING THE WHO MAKE IT HAP



Mario Borg

VASSALLO GROUP REALTY

Coordinating a group of 16 people across six sites is no mean feat, so Mario makes sure he keeps an open line of communication with the team he leads, and his superiors.

He joined Vassallo Group Realty as part of the security team nine years ago and was promoted to supervisor less than a year ago.

"The award means a lot to me, as it shows my colleagues are satisfied with my work, less than 12 months into the job."

Mario coordinates the day-to-day running of the team's roster, mindful of the needs of the staff and the company. He maintains continuous contact with each team member so that he can pre-empt any possible challenges.

"It's a hard job and I'm often under pressure. Sometimes people are unwell or need emergency leave, and we have to move things around. I communicate with staff including during my time off, and they reciprocate their loyalty. Finding cooperation from the staff cuts down on the stress big time."

Federico Dellamano

CAMPUS HUB

Following eight years of front desk experience in Budapest, Milan and Malta, Federico was hired to take care of security of the hub's carpark while the project was still ongoing.

Three years on, he leads the front desk team, taking care of the day-to-day operation of this main point of contact for residents.

"I was originally hired as part of the security personnel, and it was following an encounter with Campus Hub CEO Chris Vassallo, that I moved to front desk. I graduated in hospitality, so I feel quite at home in this role. I was even more surprised to be nominated and eventually recognised among the best supervisors."

Federico believes a good supervisor is one who is good at preplanning, is willing to work with a team to resolve issues and prepared to step in the shoes of residents when they ask for help.



Brian Calleja

CAREMALTA

Six years after Brian left his technician job at CareMalta, he returned to the care provider that had given him the job satisfaction he did not find elsewhere. Two years on, he is now being promoted from maintenance supervisor at Casa Marija in Sliema, to CareMalta maintenance assistant manager.

While the promotion reflects the trust of the company in him, his nomination as one of the company's best supervisors equally reflects his workmates' trust in him.

Brian believes the best way to lead a team is to make sure you also partake in the work yourself: "As a supervisor, you're not there to command people, but to guide and support them where necessary."

Leading a team of people, each with their own individuality, background and culture, has its challenges, but what, in life, doesn't have challenges, he asks.

At the end of the day, the satisfaction he receives from his job and the gratitude shown by the clients make it all worth it.

SUPERVISORS

PEN

Each of the six supervisors credit their loyal team for allowing them to deliver excellence and shine in what they do. They share their story on the traits needed to stand out.

Christian Abdilla

CATERESSENCE

Christian joined CaterEssence's bakery 10 years ago as a helper to the chef and he has worked his way up to the role of supervisor of a five-member team.

Before joining Vassallo Group, he had worked within the catering industry as a hotel chef. He has since turned down several opportunities to work for other companies because he is happy at CaterEssence's bakery. There, his team prepares sponges, *figolli*, and Christmas cakes among others for the decorating team to dress up.

The final product is then distributed at restaurants, cafes and residential homes run by the Group.

Christian ensures he works alongside his colleagues, while overseeing everyone's progress: "We get on really well. Each one of us knows our role, and has developed a speciality, so we work like clockwork, helping each other out when necessary".



Biljana Drmanovic

HILA

For Biljana, care is a very personal matter. She originally graduated in psychology, but when her late father Peter was diagnosed with prostate cancer she was thrown at the deep end and soon became one of his primary carers.

She grew to understand the difference care could make in a person's life and when she eventually moved to Malta, she trained as a carer and joined CareMalta. The woman who once lovingly cared for her parent started caring for other people's parents at Casa San Paolo.

After five years at the Bugibba home, Biljana moved to Casal Nuovo in Paola 18 months ago where she retained her supervisory role.

The best thing about her job, she says, is the welcoming smile of the clients.

Her advice to those aiming for a similar role in care? "It's important that you like the job and can work in a team... you need to be passionate about caring for others and have good communication skills."

Joseph Sammut

VASSALLO BUILDERS

After 39 years of physical labour at Vassallo Builders, Joseph will soon be calling it a day, but until then, he will continue to do what he does best: taking care of the staff working in the metal section.

Joseph oversees the work at the in-house metal section and coordinates projects on site. The main highlights of his career are the installation of the bridge between Mater Dei Hospital and Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre. He will also always remember the manufacturing and installation of the temporary structural steel works around the St Paul's Anglican Church bell tower in Valletta.

Joseph joined the company soon after finishing compulsory schooling. He was part of the joiners' team. He has already received a winner of the year award, and is grateful for having his efforts recognised once more.

"As a supervisor, you have to get your hands dirty and be part of the team. As every other place of work, we have our ups and down, but for every problem, there is a solution."



‘This one is for all of us’

MICHAEL PISANI

BEST MANAGER WINNER, CAMPUS HUB

The last thing Michael Pisani, general manager of Campus Hub, expected after just two years working for Vassallo Group was to win an award for his management style.

He was not even aware his staff had nominated him. But once he humbly accepted the prize he immediately placed the trophy in the staff meeting room because “this one is for all of us”.

Michael joined Campus Hub when it was still a building site and has overseen its first intake of 100 students, watching the population grow to near full capacity at over 750 residents.

He leads a multicultural team of around 40 people with a hands-on approach ensuring there is always full communication among the staff and everyone is aligned on the ultimate team goals.

“I do my best to allow the team to evolve and grow, take decisions alone, learn from their mistakes and be as independent as possible without micromanaging them,” says Michael when asked what makes his management style stand out.

“I always try and be present when needed and roll up my sleeves when necessary. I feel proud to form part of a great team of people. Without the team, Campus Hub would not be where it is today.”

With 15 years of experience in the TEFL industry, including helping to open language schools in Oxford and Manchester, Michael is well versed in the challenges involved in starting new projects. There is no such thing as a typical day for him but he does make a habit of walking through a different part of the Hub every morning “to see things from a different angle”.

Managing a site packed with hundreds of teenagers can be pretty challenging sometimes, to say the least, and the Campus Hub team has had to deal with acts of vandalism and loud parties.

“We’ve had to expel students. This is the harder part of the job. I hate having strict rules. We try to manage young residents’ freedom while safeguarding the rest of the community’s rights,” admits Michael.

Campus Hub is working on signing longer term contracts with bigger entities like the University of Malta and language schools and hopes to complete the rest of the construction project with the option of adding more beds.

“An internal challenge of ours is to try and get to a two-year waiting list, with the first semester of the next academic year already selling fast.” ■



“Without the team, Campus Hub would not be where it is today”



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With a heritage spanning over seven decades, Vassallo Group is one of Malta's most well established and successful companies, with a staff complement of over 1,900 and investments in a large variety of key macro sectors mainly in:

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| **HOSPITALITY** | **BESPOKE FURNITURE** | **ENERGY** | **EDUCATION**



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SINCE 1946



The Three Arches, Valletta Road, Mosta MST9016
Tel: +356 2143 2333 Email: info@vassallogroupmalta.com
www.vassallogroupmalta.com

Find us on 